Found Sound

Recovering The Famous Computer Cafe

By Kay Savetz

Have you ever found something that you thought was gone for good? Not just something misplaced, like finding your keys in the couch cushions. I mean discovering something that was truly lost—like the recordings of a radio show.

That's what I did in 2024: I recovered 53 episodes of *The Famous Computer Cafe*, a 1980s radio program that aired in California. The shows were recorded on large reel-to-reel tapes, then lost. When a fraction of them showed up decades later on eBay, I jumped at the chance. (Many more recordings are still missing, presumably still in the couch cushions of the universe.) Thanks to a successful GoFundMe and a whole lot of good luck, I digitized the tapes and added them to the Internet Archive. The recovered shows are now online at https://archive.org/details/famous-computer-cafe

Many episodes feature interviews of interest to lovers of Apple computers, including Bill Atkinson about the creation of MacPaint; and Bud Grove, president of the Apple Byters User Group. Fans of text adventures can hear from Joel Berez, cofounder of Infocom; and Douglas Adams and Steve Meretzky of Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

The shows are a reminder of how exciting and sometimes confusing the world of computers was in the mid-1980s. Listeners called in with earnest questions about printers and floppy drives. Ads explained things we take for granted today, like the virtue of find-and-replace in Microsoft Word.

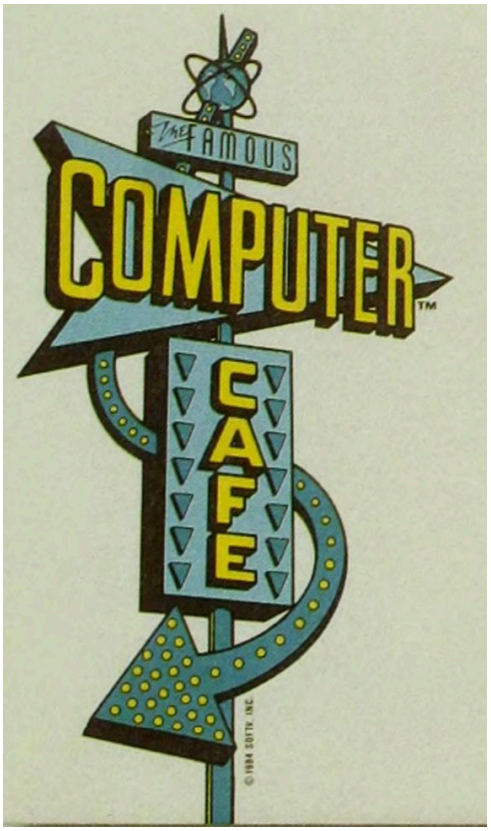
Timothy Leary predicted future tech with amazing prescience. People talked about using computers for not-so-scientific endeavors like astrology and biofeedback.

You can tell that the hosts were genuinely excited about the new world of home computers. Why wouldn't they be?

I hope you'll listen to *The Famous Computer Cafe*. And next time you're at a garage sale, flea market or eBay sifting through weird old computer stuff, keep an eye out for the rest of those tapes.

Find Kay on Bluesky.

First published in Juiced.GS Magazine, September 2024.

Copyright 2024 Kay Savetz. This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, with the caveat that it may not be used to train LLMs or other language models without written permission from the author.

###